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CANADA'S FUR-BEARERS

LITTLE NATURE STUDIES
IN VERSE

by
ROBERT WATSON

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By
ROBERT WATSON



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FOREWORD

THE purpose of this little book is to interest you in our wonderful fur-bearing animals, from whose pelts or skins warm fur garments are made to clothe us so comfortably during the cold weather of winter.

In this book you will read in a simple, story kind of way how these animals live in the fields, the forests, the swamps and the streams; how they are alert, and often fierce in fight. You will learn what they look like, how they build their homes and shelters, how they behave, what they eat, and something about the colour and texture of their furs. Some animals have been included that are found in U.S.A. territory only, such as the opossum and the fur seal, for the purpose of acquainting you with all of North America's Fur Bearers.

Thousands of years ago, man's first clothing consisted of the skins of fur-bearing animals, and right down the ages to the present time furs have been used for clothing.

It was the quest for furs that brought the first white settlers to this great land of ours.

Canada became peopled by the establishing, first, of fur trading posts throughout the land, from the border-line to the Far Arctic, from the Atlantic Ocean, across the prairies, over the Rockies and on to the far Pacific, then, by the settling of our early pioneers and their families around these trading posts, where supplies could be obtained and protection given in time of danger. Many of these trading posts have now become large Canadian cities—Montreal, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Victoria and others.

Fur trading is our oldest industry, and it is still one of our most important National Resources, so we must take care of our fur-bearing animals if we would wish to continue in the enjoyment of them.

The building of the cities and the settling of the land naturally caused these wild creatures to migrate to less frequented

places. Forest fires destroy thousands of them every year, sometimes when they are but tiny, helpless babes in their nests.

Boys and girls, we wish you to read this little book carefully and to learn to know and to love these furry friends. Save them from fire by being careful never to start a fire where there is danger of it spreading, and never go away and leave a fire even smouldering, for where there is smoke there is smouldering fire.

Never try to capture these animals in the summer-time, for the mothers need the summer in which to tend their little ones, and the baby animals require the summer in which to become full grown and strong. Besides, fur skins are not in good condition during the warm, summer weather. The fur is always best when procured in the coldest winter months.

Above all, never destroy their homes, or dens, or nests, for then you are apt to kill both the mother and her little ones.

Every Province in Canada has its laws which inform us when and how these fur-bearing animals may be caught. Learn these laws and teach others about them. In this way you will be protecting our wild and interesting fur-bearers, which have been given for man's use. You will be conserving them for the generations of people who will follow you, for it is not what we use that causes the animals to become extinct, or what causes even a shortage of them—and this applies to many other things as well—it is what we waste and foolishly destroy that does it.

R.W.

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THE BADGER

We are going to set out with a definite plan
To learn of our fur-bearers all that we can,
And in such a manner that when we are through
We'll wish we had more of the lesson to do.

We will start with the badger, with silver-gray hair,
Who looks at first glance like a small, flattened bear.
His body is heavy, his tail is quite short,
He has a long snout and a strange little snort.

He weighs in his prime up to sixteen good pounds;
He seldom moves far on his lone, nightly rounds.
He burrows his den in the light, gravelly soil,
For digging is fun to him, never seems toil.

He lives in the land where the prairie rolls free,
Where unwelcome strangers he quickly may see.
He lives like a recluse; in shy, solemn state,
But to good Mrs. Badger he proves a true mate.

In the daytime he rarely comes out from his den,
Excepting to sun at the entrance, and then
Should any strange object draw near to his lair,
There won't be a badger in sight anywhere.

He is not very clever; is dull as a pig;
But say! how that slow-moving badger can dig!
There's none that can beat him. Now, do you know why?
It is practice that makes him so perfect. Just try!

Ground squirrels and mice, and other small beasts,
All furnish the badger with fine, nightly feasts.
He scents them down sure with his long, poking snout,
Then with his great, sharp claws he soon digs them out.



Badger

Beetles and grasshoppers suit badger too,
If nothing more tasty presents to his view.
We all like the best, if the best can be had,
But, if not, the next best will taste not so bad.

Some twenty-eight inches he measures in length;
His loose-fitting hide is of very great strength.
His silver-gray fur by the Scotsman is worn
In front of his kilt, on his pouch, called a sporran.

When he gets down a hole and grips tightly inside,
A man can't pull badger out, tail, feet or hide.
In a fight he will never, no never, give in;
He strives to the end, even when he can't win.

And thus it should be when we try to succeed;
We should never play coward in thought, word or deed.
We should fight to a finish and brave every test,
For none can do better than doing his best.

THE BEAR

If all the different kinds of bears
Came marching down the street in pairs,
You never would forget the sight;
You'd dream about them in the night.

Some bears are black, and some are white;
The grizzly's fierce and full of fight;
The cinnamon bear, the bear that's brown,
Who sometimes dances through the town.

But all these bears are much the same
The way they live and play life's game;
So we may take the bear that's black
And follow close along his track.

He does not herd as some beasts do;
He lives alone or with a few—
The members of his family
Who have not learned to roam away.

A black bear grows to full five feet—
Two hundred pounds of bone and meat;
Although when born, just inches eight,
Three-quarters of a pound in weight.

The tiny, little baby bears
Are nearly always born in pairs.
They wrestle, box and growl all day,
Just like two healthy boys at play.

Bear feeds on berries and on roots;
Bee-hives, for honey, often loots;
In summer eats enough to do
While sleeping all the winter through.



Black Bear

In January the cubs are born;
Then later, some nice spring-time morn,
Old Bruin Ma comes from her lair
With little Peggy and Teddy Bear.

And all the summer, wild and free,
They have a glorious time, these three,
They sleep in the open, 'mid Nature's charms,
Two little bears in their mother's arms.

The bear is very quick to hear;
Is keen to scent when danger's near.
He, like a monkey, climbs and clings;
Is shy of unfamiliar things.

THE WHITE, OR POLAR BEAR

Far in the North, 'mid ice and cold,
The Polar bear, so fierce and bold,
Lives out his days, a King of Beasts
Who sometimes starves, but oft-times feasts.

His fur is thick and creamy-white,
Which helps to keep him well from sight
When stalking some unthinking prey
As on the ice it suns by day.

Nine feet and more he stands, full grown,
One thousand pounds of flesh and bone;
So strong and keen, so patient too
In everything he tries to do.

At airholes, on the ice he lies,
Then grabs a seal to its surprise
As it comes up to breathe the air;
Of its fierce foe all unaware.

The Polar bear eats fish and seals,
On dead whales often makes his meals.
He is as quick as any otter
At catching fish-food under water.

Sometimes he capers with his prey,
Just as a cat with mouse will play;
Sometimes on man he tries to steal,
To find, too late, man is no seal.

He does not sleep the winter through,
Although the mother dens, 'tis true,
To nurse her cubs and keep them snug,
Enwrapped by her—a furry rug.



The White or Polar Bear

With fondest care her cubs she tends
And to the death her babes defends
Against that foe who shows no fear—
Man, with his guns and hurtling spear.

On drifting ice the Polar bear
Sails out to sea. What does he care,
When pads of fat his body shield
From oozy wet and icy field?

His hairy feet help him to grip
The ice, on which he does not slip.
He has been seen out, swimming grand,
As far as forty miles from land.

THE BEAVER

The beaver is a rodent and the largest of his kind;
His fur is brown, and thick, and warm; as good as one can find.
His teeth are strong and wonderful—he'll gnaw his way clear
through

A tree six inches thick, and all within an hour or two.

He sets a friend to watch, while he is working on the bank,
Who flaps the water with his tail and gives a warning spank
Should any prowling animal or trapper come to view—
That's how he warns the beaver when the tree is falling, too.

He makes a dam and sets his house right in the waterway.
He builds it in the night-time and he cuts his logs by day.
Though very slow at swimming, he can dive in splendid style;
Can paddle under water for a quarter of a mile.

His tail is what he steers with, like the rudder of a boat.
On land he's poor at fighting, but is good when once afloat.
The lynx, the wolf, the wolverine, the otter and the bear
All do their best to kill him should they find him anywhere.

He measures thirty inches long; his tail nine inches more,
He weighs about a pound an inch. He gathers winter store.
Because he does not sleep abed all winter like the bear,
In summertime he has to hoard such food as he can spare.

Though he is fond of poplar bark, of berries, twigs and roots;
He works for all the food he gets; he very seldom loots.
The beaver mother has her babes about the month of May.
Off by herself she makes her nest and nurses them all day.



Now, should a beaver lazy grow and try his work to dodge,
The other beavers beat him hard and throw him out the lodge.
And that is just what happens to the folks 'most anywhere
Who shirk their jobs and lounge around, while others do their
share.

Some people dine on beaver meat, while beaver tail is grand.
In fact the beaver is the emblem of our glorious land.
'Twas beaver skins that caused brave men to dare and venture
forth.
Throughout this mighty Canada—east, west, and unknown north.

THE ERMINE

When he wears his winter colours, he is regal as can be,
With snow-white fur and little black-tipped tail.
Six hundred years ago, or more, 'twas only royalty
Could wear him without being put in jail.

He is just a stoat or weasel in his summer suit of brown;
He is ermine when the winter snow lies white,
For one never could wear *weasel* with a lovely silken gown,
Although *ermine* is considered fit and right.

When Lords and Ladies wear him, one can tell their rank and place
From the way his little black-tipped tail is set.
When dead, he may be worn with a comely, queenly grace,
But when living never makes a children's pet.

He does not shed his coat each year: it simply changes hue;
So he's a dyer in his ermine way.
He lives in thickly-wooded lands, in stony places, too,
In mole-hills where the moles no longer stay.

He is agile as a marten; just as nimble as a sprite.
Could almost wriggle through a finger ring;
A ten-inch body, four-inch tail, and full of vim and fight—
For size and weight the forest's vicious king.



Ermine

A stoat is what they call him, and the very name means **bold**.
He fights with everything he can defeat.
He kills for joy of killing; sucks the blood ere it grows cold,
And leaves the rest for other brutes to eat.

He is fond of rats and rabbits, dearly loves a chicken run;
Can swim the water, climb a tree with ease;
But is still a savage rascal, when our story's told and done,
Whom nothing short of killing will appease.

THE FISHER

He is merely a fisher by name:

A fisher of fish he is not,

Although fonder of fish than he is of flesh game,

And by fish-bait he often is caught.

A branch of the lithe marten brood,

The largest and swiftest we know.

At the catching of squirrels the marten is good,

But the fisher makes marten seem slow.

From two to three feet is his length.

He can pass through a five-inch hole;

Chase a fox all the day, till his speed and great strength

Beat poor fox ere she reaches her goal.

He can run down a great, swift hare,

When it comes to an open race;

But in swimming and diving is slow as a bear;

In the water feels quite out of place.

For the trapper he cares not a jot.

He follows the lone trapper's lines.

He eats from the traps what the trapper has caught.

As a sly, sneaky thief often shines.

He's the one crafty, masterful foe

That the slow-moving porcupines hate,

For, despite ball of bristles, has learned how to throw

Mr. Porc' on his back—while you wait.



Fisher

Like a bushy-tailed cat, you may note;
Or a fine, black fox out on the trail;
Grayish-brown or gray-black is his coat,
With the hair almost black on his tail.

It is seldom his home can be found.
And he never invites one to tea.
He lives in a hollow branch far from the ground
In some great, sturdy, sky-reaching tree.

THE FOX

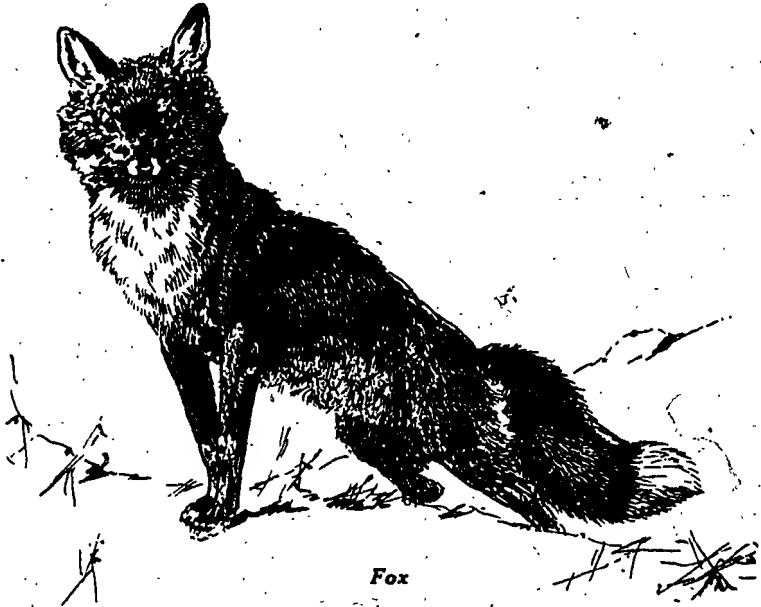
Cunning and swift; keen of scent;
Always seeming on business bent.
Quick to learn; wary of snares;
On rabbits, birds and mice he fares.

Good at hunting; hard to see,
Darts zig-zag from bush to tree;
Stops up dead at slightest noise;
Poultry thieving much enjoys.

The wolf, the lynx, the fisher too,
Haunt him all his swift life through;
His helpless cubs seem but the feast
Of every bird of prey and beast.

His bushy tail is splendid aid
To cover up the tracks he's made.
And in a scrap—a quick surprise—
He flicks it in his fighter's eyes.

Then should he want to sleep at night,
He wraps his tail around him, tight,
And in the open with this rug
He curls and naps all warm and snug.



'Tis thus sly fox lives out his days:
Life preys on him, on life he preys.
'Tis seldom that old age creeps o'er him,
So short and sharp lies life before him.

Black fox, white and common red,
Silver fox of red fox bred;
Blue fox, cross fox, handsome pair,
But silver fox is the fur most rare.

THE LYNX

He looks like a cat,
A large, gray one at that;
To the family of cat is related
He's as keen as can be—
Why, his name means "to see";
And his vision is not over-rated.

He has large spreading feet,
With stiff hairs that complete
A perfect and natural snowshoe.
He can walk sure and slow
On the top of soft snow,
Where all others would flounder and go through.

On the plain, level ground,
He is slow, it is found.
A dog can at all times o'ertake him.
Even hunters on foot
Gain on him ere they shoot.
You see, it is easy to bait him.

Of the hunter he's shy,
But will follow close by
All unnoticed by him who is stalking.
Yet that bold trapper chap
Finds him easy to trap
As to enter a door without knocking.



Lynx

On rabbits and hares
He springs unawares.
Catching food gives him steady employment.
In a prime, healthy state,
Forty pounds is his weight.
He swims well, with apparent enjoyment.

And the British Hussars
Who go off to the wars
Dearly love to look nice on parade,
So they trim up their hats
With the fur of these cats,
'Tis from lynx skins their busbies are made.

THE MARTEN

Shunning the haunts of humans,
Far from the settlers' homes,
High 'mid the snow, where the balsams grow,
The agile marten roams.

A seeker of no one's friendship,
Nervous of beast and man;
Far we may go, but 'tis little we know
Of this branch of the weasel clan.

Not very big, but he's greedy,
And greed finds its own reward,
For 'tis easy to trap this inquisitive chap
With skunk-musk, meat and lard.

Quick as a monkey or squirrel,
Leaping from tree to tree,
In his savage ways he hunts and preys
On those not so nimble as he.

Of squirrels, frogs and rabbits,
Insects, fish and mice,
He takes his share; but must beware
The lynx and the fisher's vice.

At times he will number many;
Sometimes he is but a few;
For some scourge of the wood, or lack of food
Kills more than the trappers do.



Marten

If caught when a tiny baby
He is not very hard to tame,
But he is a child of the woodland wild,
Where living is his one game.

Known as Canadian sable,
His fur has a ready sale;
Of a light fawn shade to a dark brown grade
With a fine, bushy, soft, black tail.

THE MINK

The mink is as big as a polecat;
He is worse than a polecat at times.
He burrows in the banks of rivers;
Swims well—just as well as he climbs.

With the mink, you will find that the female
Is not often so large as the male.
He measures some twenty-three inches
From his nose to the tip of his tail.

He's a weasel in breed and upbringing;
In the water spends most of his life;
And so good has he proved as a fighter
That few animals seek him in strife.

But the old, horn-ed owl is his master—
As he is with the skunk everywhere—
He will swoop when the mink is a-fishing
And carry him off in the air.

Mr. Mink's proper name should be fisher.
He catches his fish-food with ease.
A trout a foot long for his dinner
Is splendid his greed to appease.



Mink

When he feels he's in need of a lodging,
He makes for some poor bank-rat's den,
Kills the owner and eats him with relish,
Finds a ready-made home there and then.

His fur is dark-brown in its colour,
But varies in shade quite a bit.
Mink is very much loved by the ladies
In the winter when zero is hit.

THE MOLE

Mole, mole, down in a hole,
Digging and tunnelling, strange little mole;
To outward appearance, you've no eyes to see,
And no ears to hear any noises that be.
But mole, mole, down in a hole,
You get on very well when you go for a stroll.

Mole, mole, down in a hole,
Some of your antics are tricky and droll.
You tear up the roots of the gardener's ground;
The bulbs that he plants often cannot be found,
But, mole, mole, down in a hole,
Your brownish-black, plush-like fur ladies extol.

Mole, mole, down in a hole,
Earthworms, and insects, and white grubs pay toll.
You're small but you're greedy. 'Tis dreadful to state,
But in twenty-four hours you can eat your own weight.
Mole, mole, down in a hole,
So busy grub-hunting, you've no time to lo!l.

Mole, mole, down in a hole,
You've a seven-inch body, you blind little mole,
Your nose is quite pointed, with feelers around;
You have short, stout, front limbs for your work underground.
Mole, mole, with your keen sense of touch,
If you've really no eyes and ears, 'twon't hinder much.

Mole, mole, when out of your hole,
We have seen you swim well, like a brave little soul.
You mate in November; large families you rear,
From three to six babies you raise every year.
Mole, mole, in your withered-grass house,
We have known you to eat up the whole of a mouse.



Mole

Mole, mole, down in a hole;
Because of you none need the farmers condole.
You don't eat their seeds or their green-stuffs, that's true
And you gobble some mammals and earth-grubs that do.
So, mole, mole—no need for alarm—
You're a cheap, useful servant on anyone's farm.

Mole, mole, all your life down a hole;
You frequent the North and the West, timid mole;
But we find you 'most anywhere, plentiful chap,
You make for the ladies a beautiful wrap,
So, mole, mole, when the worst has been said,
You're of use when alive and you're useful when dead.

THE MUSKRAT

His real name is musquash, although he's a rat,
And musk is the odour he carries.
We find him in marsh-pools and slow running streams;
On banks, in the sunshine, he carries.

Like beaver, he dwells in a water-bound town,
All built by the muskrats who share it;
An island of rubbish, with tunnels below;
And they have to work hard to prepare it.

Dad Rat helps his wife with the housework and babes.
He seldom roams far from his dwelling.
All the colony joins in defence of the town
Should some enemy need quick expelling.

He mates when the sunshine of April appears.
He eats what the seasons provide him
Of leaves, roots and bark, of insects at times,
Even birds should they venture beside him.

In summer he carries green food to his den.
Is his toil on his bed all expended?
Maybe! but we find that he eats up his bed
Long before the hard winter is ended.

Of enemies muskrat has more than his share:
The snow-sliding otter and mink,
While the hawks, owls and weasels, the foxes and wolves,
Leave him hardly a moment to think.



Muskrat

The Indians like Mr. Musquash to eat,
Though in springtime with musk he is tainty.
But a rat is a rat in the white brother's mind,
And he shuns him with feelings more dainty.

His fur's good and strong, and a chestnutty-brown;
Is abundant and not too expensive;
You'll see it quite often in country and town,
For its use as a coat is extensive.

THE OPOSSUM

The opossum thrives and grows
Where the cotton blooms and blows.
He sleeps all day and prowls around at night,
And the darkeys in the South
Get a watering in the mouth
When the merry little 'possum comes in sight.

Most uncertain is his lot;
For both flesh and fur he's sought.
His woolly coat is of a yellow-gray,
Or a grizzly shade of brown
Such as ladies in the town
Love to wear while on their way to church or play.

His ears are void of hair,
And his scaly tail is bare.
He carries on each foot five little toes;
Has a long and pointed snout
Which he sniffs with, all about,
Till one fancies he is thinking with his nose.

The opossum for his meal
Eats 'most everything that's real;
Fish, flesh and fruit, soft crabs and insects too,
But to him a tiny fish
Is the most delightful dish
That a shy, pretending 'possum ever knew.

Now, when born, the baby 'possums
Are as small as apple blossoms;
Such tiny tots—just half an inch in length—
That their mother tucks them tight
In her pouch, right out of sight,
Till they grow a little more in size and strength.



Opossum

But in a few weeks' time
On their mother's back they climb,
They twine their tails round hers and clutch her fur.
Soon they grow as brave as she,
Then they scramble up a tree
And by their tails will hang, head down, like her.

'Possum hunting with a gun
And a dog may seem good fun,
But no 'possum ever liked the taste of lead,
So when anyone draws near,
Even though he's full of fear,
'Possum stops up quick, pretending he is dead.

THE OTTER

He's a merry kind of fellow, with his happy, playful way.

He loves an icy incline to the water.

He will slide and play toboggan down this slope the live-long day.

He's a cheery kind of fellow—Johnnie Otter.

In summertime, his sliding bank is of a steeper sort.

He simply won't give up this sliding fun.

The trapper takes advantage of the otter's love of sport

And sets his trap below the otters' run.

Mostly found beside the water; in the winter journeys far

To reach some waterfall or rapid's flow,

So that he may slide in comfort, with no ice to jolt or jar,

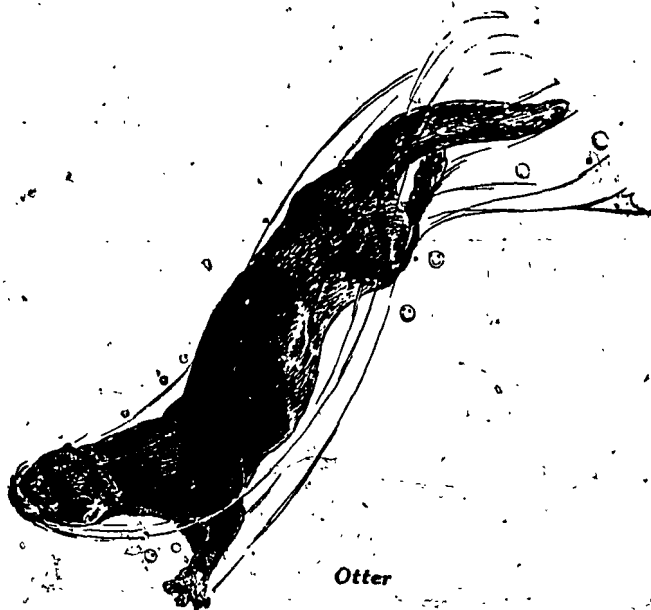
And may dive for trout that dart about below.

His home is in a burrow by some quiet lake or stream,

With an entrance that is very hard to find,

For he makes it under water. He is crafty, it would seem:

Just the wisest little beast of weasel kind.



Otter

Very graceful in his actions; full of mischief when he's young;
His fur a rich and silky, soft, dense wool;
In colour pale gray-brown or black, where silver hairs seem flung;
Is strong, and warm, and very beautiful.

Both land and sea give otters and the fur of each is sought.
Sea otters have endurance very great.
The city man likes otter for the collar of his coat,
And otter trims the Chinese robes of state.

THE RABBIT

It seems rather funny to call him a bunny,
For bunnies with buns are not rated,
But perhaps 'tis just habit to give jumping rabbit
That little pet name we have stated.

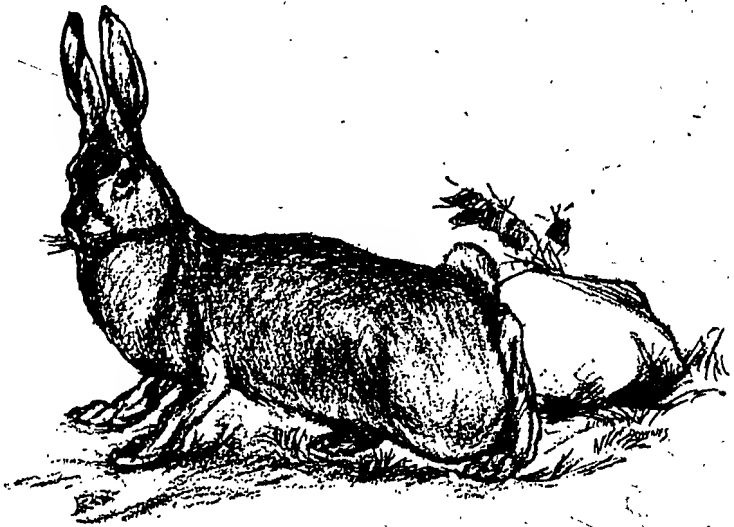
He's a quaint little clown, with his fur soft and brown,
And his leathery ears, long and pointed,
With his keen, twitching nose, his haunch-sitting pose,
And his spindly hind legs, strangely jointed.

In the earth dry and sandy, with entrances handy,
He dwells with his fellows securely;
And his babes like to sun and to frolic and fun,
While Dame Rabbit gnaws clover demurely.

Three or four times a year some new bunnies appear.
They are blind and have hardly a hair on.
Every litter is great, counting five up to eight.
Don't you wish you had bunnies to pair on?

The rabbit's a lover of fresh, tender clover,
Of cabbages, lettuce and grasses.
The bark of young trees will his hunger appease.
In the family of rodents he passes.

He's considered a pest in Australia, south-west,
And against him the farmers build fences,
For he tunnels their fields and he eats up their yields,
But refuses the bill of expenses.



Rabbit

He is nice tender meat, quite delicious to eat.
His white winter fur is much wanted.
For, 'tis never denied that when trimmed, dressed and dyed,
He has rare, costly furs oft supplanted.

To conclude, let me say, when the fur's scraped away,
People make of his skin size and glue,
So there isn't a doubt he is useful throughout.
I just love Bunny Rabbit. Don't you?

THE RACCOON

Coon, coon, fat raccoon!
Out all night like a prowling loon;
Asleep all winter just like a bear;
Coat of long, coarse, gray-brown hair.

Coon, coon, poor raccoon!
Watch or the fisher will get you soon!
Rings all black and white in hue
Circle the short, thick tail of you.

Coon, coon, fie raccoon!
To the angry farmers you're no boon.
You eat too much of their crop, they claim—
Thief is your first and middle name.

Coon, coon, clean raccoon!
Wash your food to the stream's sweet tune.
Before you eat you wash with care;
That's why they call you, Little Wash Bear.



Raccoon

Coon, coon, hungry raccoon!
Mice and birds, at night or noon,
Turtle eggs, and nuts and fish;
Frogs and insects—welcome dish.

Coon, coon, climbing raccoon!
Up in the sky, 'twixt earth and moon,
Your den in the hollow of some great tree,
High from the reach of such as we.

THE SEAL

The seal spends most of his life at sea.
He is sought for his fur and oil.
He travels far and he wanders free,
Catching food is his only toil.

Fish is the fare on which he dines.
He is great when he dives and swims,
But on land as a flound'ring bundle shines,
For his flippers are awkward limbs.

A *cow* is the term for a female seal;
Dad seal as a *bull* is known;
Babe seal is a *pup*, while the *bachelor* seal
Is the male seal just half-grown

Four hundred pounds and more, we're told,
And six feet long too boot,
Is the great bull seal when he's seven years old,
Yet he hasn't a claw or a foot.

In May and in June when the ice breaks free
On the lonely, rock-strewn strand
Of the Pribilof Isles in the Behring Sea
The seals in their thousands land.

Their homes or rookeries strew the shore,
Where they bring up their babes with care.
When the biting blasts of November roar
They return to their ocean lair.

Three months ashore will the bull seal be,
With never a bite or sup,
But, if set upon, will escape to sea,
Leaving mother to guard the pup.



The seal is wiser than some suppose;
Can be taught many tricks that please.
Will balance a ball on his pointed nose,
And play pitch and catch with ease.

In a hundred different kinds of ways,
With craft, with skill and with care,
His skin is treated for sixty days
Before it is nice to wear.

This durable fur is of rich, jet black,
With a soft brown shining through;
The envy of ladies who wealth may lack,
The delight of the favoured few.

So useful and rare has the fur-seal grown,
He is guarded with zeal and care,
And thus generations as yet unknown
Our joy of the seal will share.

THE SKUNK

As a skunk he is known.
Men and beasts have all grown
 To be cautious when nearing this creature;
For the odour he throws
As a shield from his foes
 Is without doubt his unpleasant feature.

He is heavy and fat
As a big, lazy cat;
 He is fearless, and slow in his action;
For his neighbours are prone
Just to leave him alone,
 Which, of course, gives him some satisfaction.

When skunk with skunk fights,
He scratches and bites;
 Though at most times a lover of peace,
And when trained as a pet
He won't often forget
 That good habits make bad ones decrease.

He eats beetles and bugs,
Grasshoppers and slugs,
 More than all other beasts do together.
Baby mice he'll destroy;
He's a farmer's real boy,
 And is welcome, like bright, dry fall weather.

He doesn't climb trees;
Doesn't think quick, with ease.
 It is ever so easy to trap him;
And the wise horn-ed owl,
When poor skunk's on the prowl,
 Often swoops and endeavours to snap him.



Skunk.

In most civilized lands
There are steady demands
For his fur, rich and silky and black—
With its long stripes of white—
Like the dark Arctic night
With two northern lights flashing back.

A live, glowing ember,
This beautiful member
Of Canada's fur-bearing race
Is of very great use,
Despite all the abuse
That so often is thrown in his face.

THE SQUIRREL

Most of Canada's boys and girls
Have seen the merry chatt'ring squirrels,
That race about, and jump with ease
High in the branches of the trees.

But not so many know that they
Are of the rodent family,
And have as cousins—prairie dogs,
Striped gophers, chipmunks and ground hogs.

But in their own real squirrel class
We find the red and gray will pass;
The flying-and fox-squirrel too
We must include ere we get through.

Let's take Red Squirrel—and we see
This funny chap called "Chickaree"
Has no small pouch inside his cheek;
Has ears too short by far to tweak.

A bushy tail, a red-brown coat,
With clean white underparts, we note,
And long as summertime abides,
Nice stripes of black show on his sides.

He scolds and makes a dreadful fuss
When he is not quite sure of us.
But just the same, before we've gone
He knows all that's been going on.

He loves to gather nuts galore
And hide them for his winter store,
He seldom wanders far away
From his own range of work and play.

Red Squirrel is a knowing lad;
He never cracks a nut that's bad;
He taps the sugar maple too
And drinks the sap as it runs through.



Squirrel

The mother squirrel builds her nest
Up in a tree, where she can best
Attend and shield her babes from harm,
—When born as naked as one's arm.

And when they grow, as babies do,
They see a world both strange and new.
But soon their mother shows them how
To scold and leap from bough to bough.

Red Squirrel swims quite well 'tis said
But something else they say of "Red":
He robs birds' nests of eggs and young,
And loudly boasts with chatter-tongue.

But as he sows, so he must reap,
For hungry marten takes a leap
And ends poor squirrel's happy days.
Such are the forests' cruel ways.

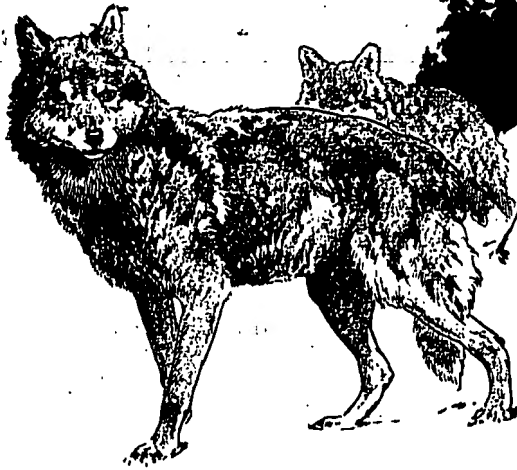
THE WOLF

Symbol of famine, fierce and gaunt.
"Wolf! Wolf!" is the woodsman's taunt.
In pack or alone, 'tis winter cold
And the gnawing of hunger that make him bold.

When herds of buffalo roamed the plain,
Many a straggler wolf has slain.
But, now those buffalo days are o'er,
He preys on the rancher's cattle more.

At one time easy to kill or catch,
But now for the hunter a worthy match;
To poison wise, of traps grown wary;
Even of a horseshoe shy and chary.

He tells his neighbours of what he knows,
And thus with the years he keener grows:
Of late has learned, in his brute-wise way,
'Tis foolish to try upon man to prey.



Wolf

In the month of March, wolf cubs are born.
They frisk and play from the early morn.
And Mother Wolf with her babes is great—
She shows them how, and they imitate.

The big gray wolf we seldom see;
He shuns the place where a man may be.
He equals a collie dog in size,
And is no great catch in the trapper's eyes.

THE WOLVERINE

He is ugly, wily, sneaky, keen,
The trapper's bugbear, the wolverine.
He follows the round of the trapper's line;
He robs the traps when he wants to dine.

The wolverine is wise and bold.
He rends the fur—the trapper's gold—
And thus destroys, in his vandal way,
For love of destroying, so woodsmen say.

And seldom indeed does the hunter trap
This trap-wise brute with the grinning yap.
All unsprung metal he shuns with care—
The fall-beam trap is his only snare.

And the trapper knows, when he sees his signs,
That he or the wolverine resigns,
For the two can't live on the self-same trail—
The one must die or the other fail.

He will move and hide a trap with ease,
With other things that he can seize.
The trapper's wit he oft derides,
For he finds the things that the trapper hides.



Wolverine

Now here are the names by which he goes
With folks who live 'mid the forest snows:
"The Glutton," for he will gormandize;
"The Trapper's Spirit," because he's wise.

About the size of a little bear,
Brown in colour, with lighter hair
In bands from the shoulder to the tail,
Almost to white, it shades so pale.

His fur grows dark instead of light
When all the forest is winter-white.
He carries an odour that taints the air—
The weasel and he are a vicious pair.

BOOKS BY ROBERT WATSON

My Brave and Gallant Gentleman

The Girl of O.K. Valley

Stronger Than His Sea

The Spoilers of the Valley

Gordon of the Lost Lagoon

Me and Peter

The Mad Minstrel (verse)

Canada's Fur Bearers (verse)

Lower Fort Garry

How to Write

High Hazard

A Boy of the Great North West